# SIERRA

VOLUME I
NUMBER 1

WINTER, 1971
ONE DOLLAR

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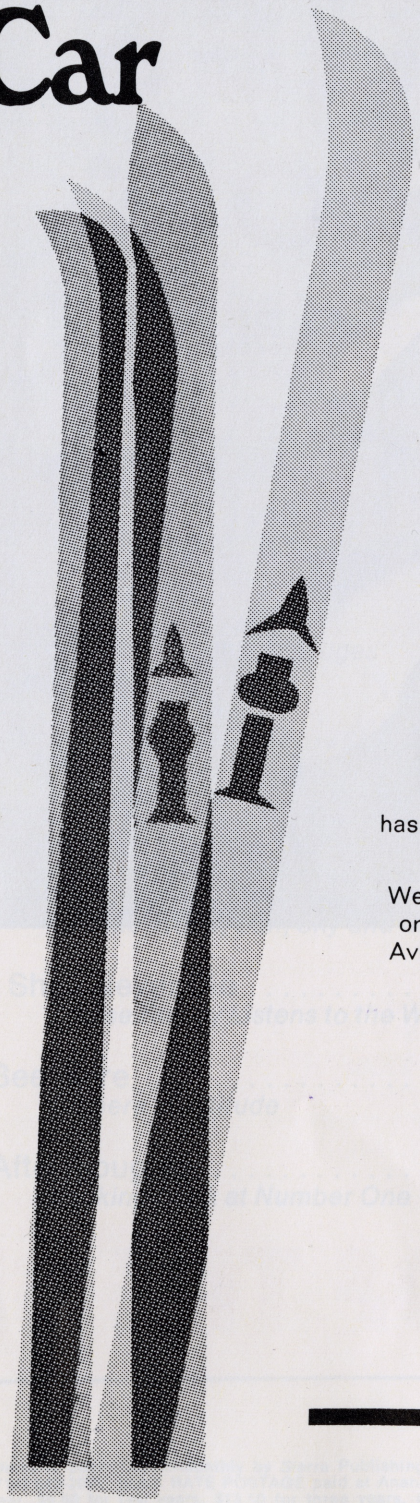

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# SIERRA

VOLUME I
19531 Airport Way South

NUMBER 1
Santa Ana, California 92707

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# SIERRA

The Magazine for the Sportsman and the Ecologist . . .

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# Sportsman or Ecologist? Why Not Both?

Intelligent, thinking people must believe that ecologist and sportsman share an unusual amount in common. For some reason, publications state daily the belief that an outdoor sportsman is not conservation or ecology oriented. Conversely, these publications promulgate the idea that a conservationist or ecologist isn't an outdoor sportsman. Bunk!

Conservation is something with which we're all deeply concerned, and should practice. The Sierra and its living inhabitants were created in infinite beauty. My belief is that man is supposed to enjoy and draw strength from this beauty. Some will say, "Sure, but from afar, not by tramping through the forest, discarding waste, ruining the natural scheme of things."

Enjoyment of the Sierra from afar is comparable to listening to Carmen from outside the opera house — impossible! I agree that people who, while enjoying the Sierra close at hand, choose not to practice conservation. These people should recognize their error. They see litter in the wilderness and, instead of picking it up, they add to it, or elect to ignore it. This is a current attitude in America: "Let someone else do it."

What is this leading to? Just this, *Sierra* is a magazine for those interested in the Sierra Nevada, and the history, enjoyment and preservation of this magnificent range of mountains. It is not my intention to be anti-sportsman or anti-conservationist. Rather, *Sierra* and I are pro-Sierra.

Barry L. Dodd
Editor and Publisher

# Flying the Sierra

Though serving an air transportation route thought to be impossible by most, Trans Sierra Airlines is growing rapidly. Growth is so rapid, in fact, that in only one year of operation, Trans Sierra has become one of the most traveled airlines of its type in America.

Growing pains sometimes can be more amusing than painful. Trans Sierra's original plan was to fly the company's single Cessna 402A aircraft between Los Angeles, Bishop/Mammoth and San Jose. According to plan, the Cessna was painted in a brilliant shade that was soon to be called Trans Sierra Orange, then put into service in October, 1970. Before the one-plane airline had operated for long, however, demand was sufficient to warrant ordering a second aircraft, another Cessna 402A.

Management discovered a suitable aircraft and scheduled it to be painted in – what else – Trans Sierra Orange. Growing pains pushed these new plane plans right out the window. A few days before the second aircraft was scheduled to enter the paint shop, somebody along the Trans Sierra line goofed!

The original airplane was flying its regular scheduled run, but a communications breakdown occurred and one of the single plane's flights was oversold – more tickets had been issued than the number of seats available on the aircraft.

That's a nice problem for an airline. Trans Sierra's president, energetic Ernie Taub, set about placing the second aircraft in service – only temporarily, of course. The green-yellow Cessna 402 flew direct to the problem spot, picked up the excess passengers, proceeded to its destination – and has been doing so ever since. Trouble is, somehow this busy airplane never has a chance to make it to the paint hangar.

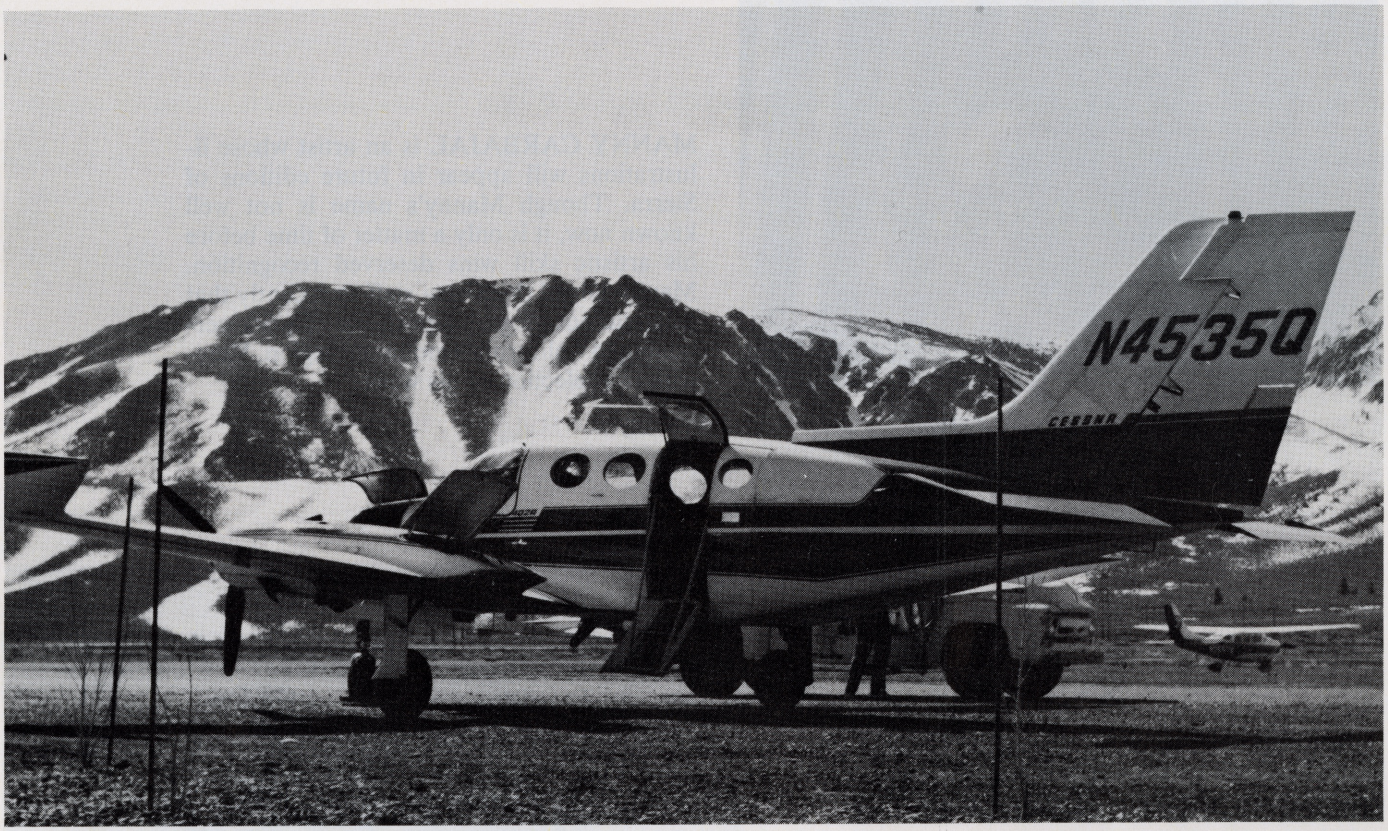
It's now Trans Sierra Orange and Trans Sierra Green-Yellow – but the 402's don't fly any differently.

What of the future? For Trans Sierra Airlines the future's so bright that onlookers have to shade their eyes. The airline presently is acquiring other aircraft. Expanded route structure, increased frequency of flights, and better connections with ground transportation are in the offing.

Such a forward looking venture takes capital – and it's there. Allan Silliphant, president of Stereovision, a movie making firm, has invested in Trans Sierra's future.

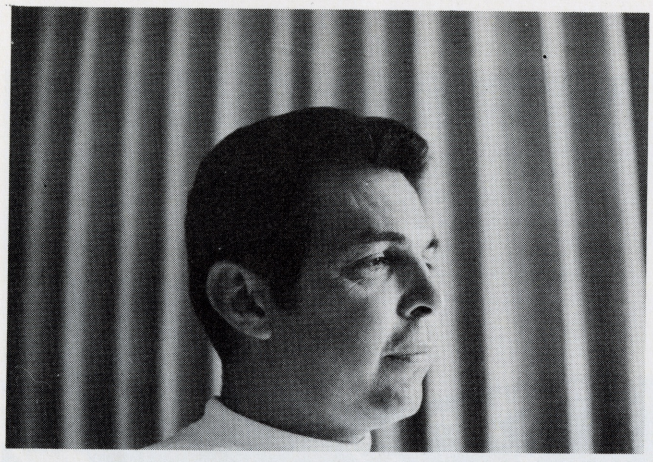
Between Silliphant and Taub, Trans Sierra is well on its way to becoming another PSA (Permanently Successful Airline).

But, what's it going to be – Trans Sierra Orange or Trans Sierra Green-Yellow?



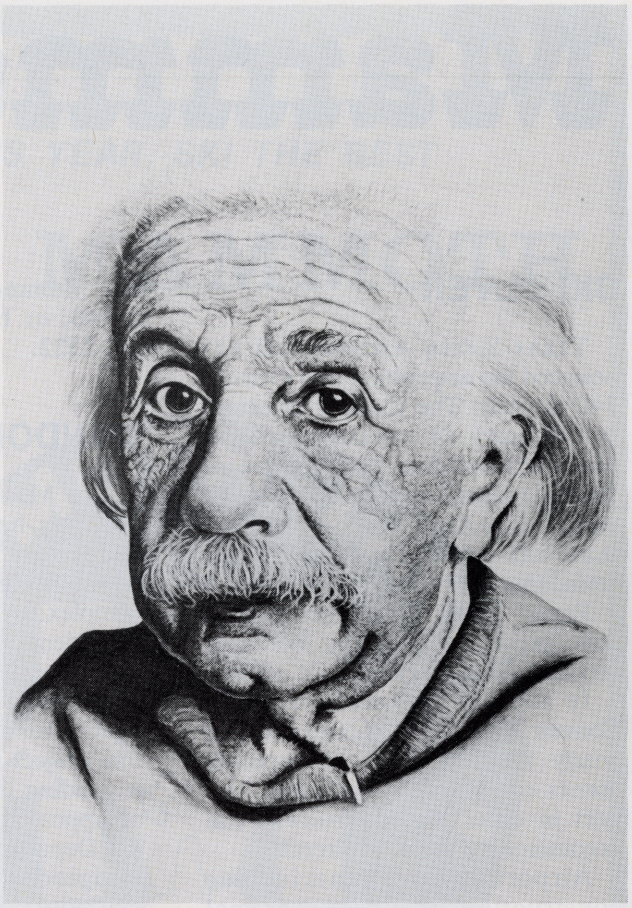

***Trans Sierra Airlines: Flight Into Excitement***

# MANNY CARBAJAL

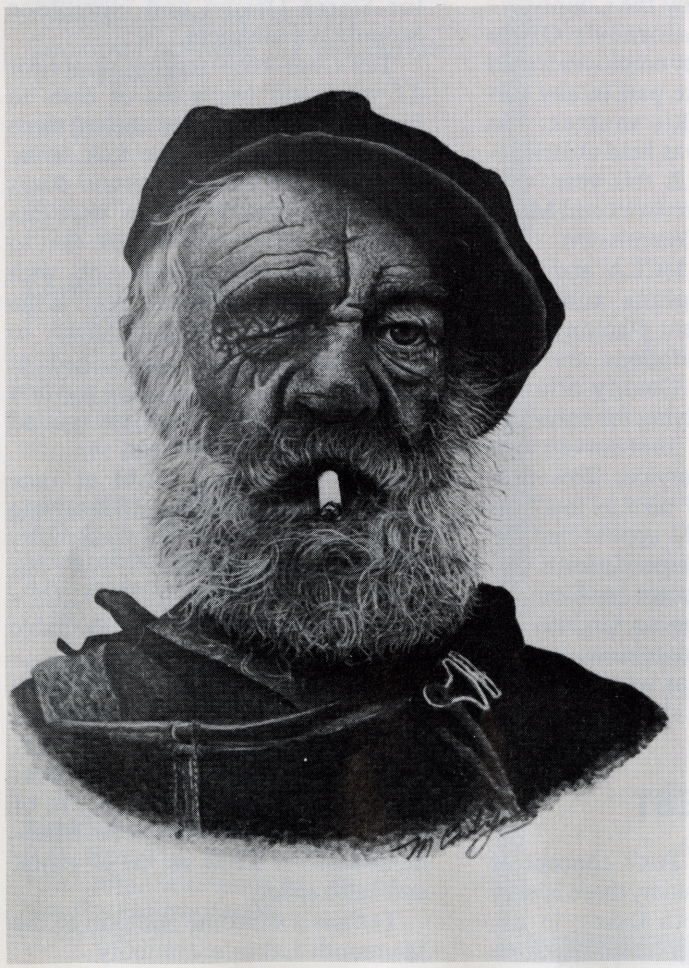


MANNY CARBAJAL is an artist whose illustrations will appear in future editions of Sierra. Though Manny's name is not well known now, it is only a matter of time before his artistic skill wins deserved recognition. Manny joined the Sierra staff so recently that he could not prepare a portfolio of work pertaining to California's mountain region. Herewith is a selection of his work.

*Mother and Child . . .*



*Einstein . . .*



*Whiskers . . .*

# Mammoth Drifts

## SKI FLYER

Trans Sierra Airlines has announced the acquisition of a Convair 340 aircraft. The Convair is equipped to carry 44 passengers. Cruise speed of more than 300 mph means the flight from Los Angeles to Mammoth Lakes Airport will require less than one hour. On-board flight attendants will serve refreshments.

Ernest Taub, Trans Sierra president, expects the airplane will be in service for the Christmas ski season.

In addition to purchase of the Convair, Trans Sierra has carried out nearly $80,000 worth of improvements on Mammoth Lakes Airport in order that the runway can accommodate the new aircraft.

Airport improvements include construction of a new terminal building.

Reservation information may be obtained by calling Trans Sierra Airlines reservations at (213) 646-3054 in Los Angeles, (408) 286-1172 in San Jose, (714) 935-4438 in Mammoth and (714) 873-6321 in Bishop.

## RESERVATIONS

Mammoth Lakes now offers, free of charge, a skiing and summer vacation reservation service. The service is in direct contact with each of the lodges and condominiums. Reservations and confirmations may be made during the initial call. The reservation service is operated by the Mammoth Lakes Chamber of Commerce motel and lodge committee, which represents every type of accommodation available in the Mammoth area. The committee advises calling ahead for reservations, but adds that visitors who arrive in Mammoth and wish to find reservations quickly may stop at the Mammoth Reservation Service Office in the center of Mammoth Village on Highway 203. Additional information and a packet of descriptive brochures may be obtained through Mammoth Reservation Service, P. O. Box 277 BD, Mammoth Lakes, California 93546, or by telephoning (714) 934-2522.

## CONDOMINIUM FIGHT

The Mono County Board of Supervisors has ignored court actions and has granted a use permit for the construction of a condominium complex.

"Friends of Mammoth," an organization of over 200 property owners and citizens of Mammoth, have been fighting for nearly six months to have this project stopped. Litigation now is pending in the 3rd District Court of Appeals against the County Building Department, awaiting a full investigation of the project. UCLA and USC both have offered to make studies of the project, but their offers have been refused by the County.

The District Attorney's Office stated that no county employes would be permitted to take part in any survey regarding this matter. An informal meeting was held at Bridgeport, Calif., Oct. 12, this year, with Mono County Supervisors and Mono County Planning Commission.

At this meeting UCLA and USC presented their plans and were informed that present planning commission recommendations are considered sufficient. County officials said they were applying for state and federal funds for a joint survey with the U.S. Forest Service. This proposed survey could take as much as three years. It would appear that the County Board of Supervisors is trying to solve its present problem by promising a solution so far into the future that this condominium project will be completed, as will many that have not even been started yet.

## TEX'S NEWEST

In keeping with Tex's concept of total service to the skier, there is now a Tex's in Mammoth Lakes, in addition to the existing stores in June Lake, June Mountain, and Santa Monica.

The new store opened the first part of October and has a decor reminiscent of the Old Mammoth mining era. In the store's entrance is a beautifully restored antique safe from Aurora and framed on the walls are original finds from the Mammoth Creek area – a gold pan, old coffee pot, etc. A visit to Tex's in Mammoth is a reminder to the skier of what Mammoth was in days gone by.

As in the other stores, there is a complete rental and repair service in the new Mammoth store. Of course prices in all locations are the same as those in Santa Monica.

Tex's also carries a complete selection of touring mountaineering equipment – touring skis, boots and poles, mountaineering parkas, and tents. Tex's is the exclusive dealer for Sierra Design and Northface Mountain equipment.

Tex's has been serving skiers for 47 years and has a list of firsts to their credit. Tex's was one of three original ski shops in the L.A. area. They were the first to entertain skiers with their own TV show that has lasted 15 years. They are the first to have factory trained personnel with facilities on the premises. Tex's is the first to introduce GLM-Headway to California currently established at June Mountain. Tex's is also the first and only ski shop to sell discounted June Mountain lift tickets.

After introducing GLM at June Mountain one year ago and receiving many requests about the availability of GLM skis at Mammoth, Tex's has again tried to cater to the skier's needs by having GLM Skis available in the Mammoth store.

Mammoth Mountain ski school has agreed to teach using GLM skis upon request.

Total square footage of all locations in June Lake is 2500 sq. ft. of selling and rental area. The Mammoth store is 2100 sq. ft. of rental and sales space.

Tex's is a welcome addition to the Mammoth Lakes community.

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# SLIM PRINCESS

*These Rails Run Backward In Time*

The Laws Railroad Museum and Historical Exhibit, Laws, Calif., just four and one-half miles northeast of Bishop, Calif., is more than just a collection of railroaders' Californiana. This museum is "End-o'-Track" for probably the most successful narrow gauge railroad ever to operate on the North American Continent.

Known as "The Keeler Branch" and nicknamed the Slim Princess, the first section of the railroad was completed from Mound House to Candaleria, Nev., in 1882. Step by step, the narrow gauge line grew, through Basalt, Summit, Queen, Benton, Hammil, Piute to Laws, then on to Zurich, Akvord, Tibbets, Kearsarge, Owenyo and Keeler.

The railway, to serve the remote mining and early agricultural communities of the Owens Valley for almost eight decades, started operations as the Carson & Colorado, but was acquired by the Southern Pacific Railway Co. in 1912.

Through the 1920's, the narrow gauge railroad was in use by the communities it served, but by 1932, passenger service was abandoned, and diminishing revenue, "declining and unpredictable use of the line," plus "expensive and time consuming transfer of shipments between narrow gauge and standard gauge cars," brought about the demise of "The Slim Princess."

April 30, 1960, was the very last day that Locomotive No. 9, a Baldwin 10-wheeler built in 1909, drawing a string of freight cars, was to make the run between Laws and Keeler, Calif.

The Southern Pacific transferred the Laws station building, Locomotive No. 9 and a selection of equipment and railroad memorabilia, to the City of Bishop and Inyo County.

In 1965, the city and county negotiated an agreement with the Bishop Museum and Historical Society to take over the Laws site as a museum – which was formally opened to the public on April 1, 1966, 83 years from the day the first scheduled train arrived in Laws from the north.

During its history, the railroad hauled equipment and supplies for construction of the Owens Valley aqueduct, which still serves the Los Angeles Metropolitan Water District, and delivered the U. S. Mail and Wells Fargo Express shipments.

Visitors to the Laws Railroad Museum and Historical Site enter a reception center in the "Sweetwater Building," so named when it was part of a set for the Paramount film, "Nevada Smith." Inside the center are displays of early day mining tools, assayer balances, Indian artifacts, Gay 90's office equipment, firearms, and items found in a country general store.

Next on the museum visitor's tour is the depot, built in 1883 for the arrival of the Carson & Colorado narrow gauge trains. The agent's office, in the depot, doubles as an exhibit and as the museum's business office.

Waiting room, baggage room and freight room are as they were when they were part of a thriving railway transportation system.

The train on display is made up of Locomotive No. 9 and a string of cars that were in use when the railroad was abandoned by the Southern Pacific.

The station agent's house, also built in 1883, contains rooms that have been restored and refurnished in the style of the railroad's heyday period.

The turntable on the museum grounds was built in 1883, too, and was in use up to the last run of April 30, 1960.

For the visitor to the Owens Valley of the Sierra, the Laws Railroad Museum and Historical Site is a look into California's past, to the days when men were railroad men, and their first lady was "The Slim Princess." •

# Stand and Stare

BY EVELYN EATON

*"What is this life if full of care*
*We have no time to stand*
*and stare?"*

W. H. Davies, the wandering English poet who wrote *Leisure* from which these lines are taken, would have liked to roam the Deepest Valley, of the great Sierra Range on the west, the Inyo-Monos and White Mountain on the east, the desert, the vast expanse of sky. He might have watched and remembered, with another poet walking down Whitney Portal Road on a spring evening, Terry Brengle's

THE FLYING GEESE
*Do you*
*still see, as I do,*
*the silver geese*
*that flew, soundless*
*above us*
*when we two*
*walked down a mountain road?*

*Here on the plains*
*the yellow corn is tall,*
*is restless in the wind.*
*My mind*
*wheels back to spring.*
*Wild, above snow-blue peaks,*
*we soar, and circle, circle*
*with the silent geese once more.*

It is better to remember the Sierra spring from "the plains," a place that is also spacious, and in its own way worthy of a stand-and-stare, than from the smog-filled city with no expanse of sky and seldom a glimpse of stars, and few migrating wings.

The sky, by day and night, draws our attention in this part of the world. As Cid Ricketts Sumner talks about her view

ACROSS MY ROOF
*Across my roof the Milky Way*
*is nonchalantly flung*
*and on a hook outside my door*
*the starry Dipper's hung.*
*A planet is foundation for*
*the pillars of my home*
*and here beside my fireplace*
*quite carelessly I roam*
*and tip my hat to outer space*
*take comets as they come —*
*how jubilant it is to be*
*a neighbor to infinity!*

We need to be jubilant, and perhaps can find it easier to shrug off gloom and discouragement if we look often at the mountains,, lifting our eyes to Whitney, Opapago, Williamson, Kearsage, Mary Austin . . . *she* liked to stand and stare and write down what she saw. How memorably she did it!

"We took up a homestead on the mesa between the Alabama Hills and the huge upflung, naked bulk of Opapago. Here, between Owens Lake and the northern end of the Alabamas, clustered all that enchanted charm of the district which people who found themselves emmeshed in it sometimes cursed as they curse the beauty of women. The Alabamas were of exceeding ancientness, and their fire-stained rocks Time sculptured into strange shapes of wierdness, between which the filmy flame of cactus flowers ran red and orange and apricot, with little patches of a more fiery green and blue pools of lupins wetted by artesian springs. The rocky core of the hills broke off somewhat abruptly just above Lone Pine, and behind that our homestead lay, looking off toward the lake and the cloud-mottled Coso country, all fawn and red and black with faint tinges of citron. The hot flat sun always 'drawing water' from the lake, so that toward morning and evening it could be seen letting down broad ladders of irised light on which, said the Indians, the children of the Rainbow came and went.

Behind us in towering blocks of gray and black and white gathered the peaks of Whitney and Opapago. Down by the rim of the hills there was an old signal smoke station of the Paiutes which I used as an altar; there was also an Indian burying ground, strewn with blue beads.

Later she came to live in Independence, where her house can still be seen and sometimes visited by those who discover *The Land Of Little Rain.*

She spoke of animals, and birds, distinguishing their song, but if she tried to understand the meaning of what they were singing, she might have been as frustrated as Cid Ricketts Sumner felt with her

BIRD WHISTLE
*This small mechanical device*
*endows me with the gift of tongues*
*so I may speak new languages*
*and sing the feather-throated songs.*
*From bog and bank there*
*comes reply —*
*cajolery, perhaps command*
*in chorused eloquence that I*
*am powerless to understand.*
*Communication seems to be*
*more than simple fluency.*

Because we hope to print a poem or two in every issue of *Sierra*, you are invited to send original contributions to the Literary Editor, accompanied by a self addressed, stamped envelope.

In the fall we have the drama of endurance, of winter coming on, the "sabers of the wind," in Martha Banning Thomas's

WINTER COMBAT

*The great trees cry aloud*
*And crack gray bones,*
*Whirling their arms in a cloud*
*Of upward high confusion;*
*Garments of leaves lie strewn*
*upon the stones*
*Trampled and darkly pressed,*
*As if they had never dressed*
*Those magnificent, writhing limbs*
*with flowing green –*
*As if an old illusion*
*Had clothed bare stature*
*transiently*
*From the staring summer sun;*
*This noise is one*
*Of character being set upon and*
*tossed*
*Broken in bits and flung to the*
*ground;*
*This is the actual sound*
*Of valiance crossed*
*By sabers of the wind, repulsed*
*unseen;*
*The winter combat of old trees*
*who've won*
*Through every terror; there*
*they stand,*
*Gaunt and gigantic clamoring*
*aloud*
*In mighty tumult, captive to the*
*steady land.*

Anyone who has seen the Bristlecone trees and those who visit the back country in November, will understand the last verse "there they stand, gaunt and gigantic." While "Valiance crossed by sabers of the wind"—(and by man-made weapons too)—must remind us of those others who once stood here, whose ancestors lived in and on this land, long before the white man arrived. We find traces of them still, signs and tokens, faint signals as we pick up an arrow head or cross the half obliterated markings of

OLD PAIUTE TRAIL

*Under the snow it lies*
*the brambly tentative path*
*winding upward*
*mocassined feet*
*travelling it*
*had dignity*
*had worth*
*so much the snow*
*the tracks beneath the snow*
*concede.*

EVELYN EATON, author, lecturer, educator, came to California in 1960, on a writing fellowship to the Huntington Hartford Foundation. She then taught at Deep Springs College, near Big Pine, for two years, before returning to the east to teach in several universities. She returned to the Sierra for summers and founded the Deepest Valley Theatre, which brought music to the Owens Valley for four years. The theatre sponsored well known artists such as the Greg Smith Choir, Iren Marik any many others. She has written 20 novels, 25 short stories for the New Yorker, and collections of poems. She presently lives in Independence, California.

The well-bred Indian went through life without leaving a defiling trace of disturbing the balance of nature, an instinctive ecologist. He believed that he and his descendants, and we and all mankind, are guests in the House of the Great Spirit, and should behave ourselves accordingly. Here in Deepest Valley, staring upward at the great range of the Sierra, it is not too hard to feel that we are *privileged* guests. We might even, while the impression lasts, carry out that beer can and stop littering the trails. •

*CONTRIBUTORS:* In this issue, in order of appearance; *Terry Brengle,* Mrs. Richard L. Brengle, now living in Indiana. She wrote *The Flying Geese* with the road to Whitney Portal in her mind. It was first printed in *The Lyric Magazine* and has been set to music by the composer Paul Earls with several performances. *The Kite* appears here for the first time.

*Cid Ricketts Sumner,* novelist with many best sellers, among them the Tammy series, in which Debbie Reynolds starred for the movie versions. Mrs. Sumner also contributed four selections to the Sierra Club publication *The Place No One Knew,* about Glen Canyon on the Colorado. She visited California and the west, but made her home in Duxbury, Massachusetts until her death in 1970.

*Martha Banning Thomas* was a New England poet, who spent the last years of her life in Nova Scotia. She was well known for the strength and beauty of her landscape and nature poems. *Winter Combat* first appeared in *Yankee.* Miss Thomas died in 1968.

Grateful acknowledgments go to the authors and publications mentioned above for permission to reprint the poems.

# Flora and Fauna

## Sage Hen

Primarily a resident of the high desert east slope of the Sierra, the Sage Grouse *(Centrocercus Urophasianus)* is known colloquially as the "Sage Hen."

In earlier times, the sage hen graced many a pioneer's table and added something special to the miner's fare, but these birds fell victim to the "meat hunter," and, now, without protection, would soon become extinct.

Sage hens vary in size from four and one-half pounds to eight pounds in weight. Long tails and striking mottled markings make this a truly magnificent bird. Their coloration, grays and dappled browns, blends into the low grasses and brush of their desert home.

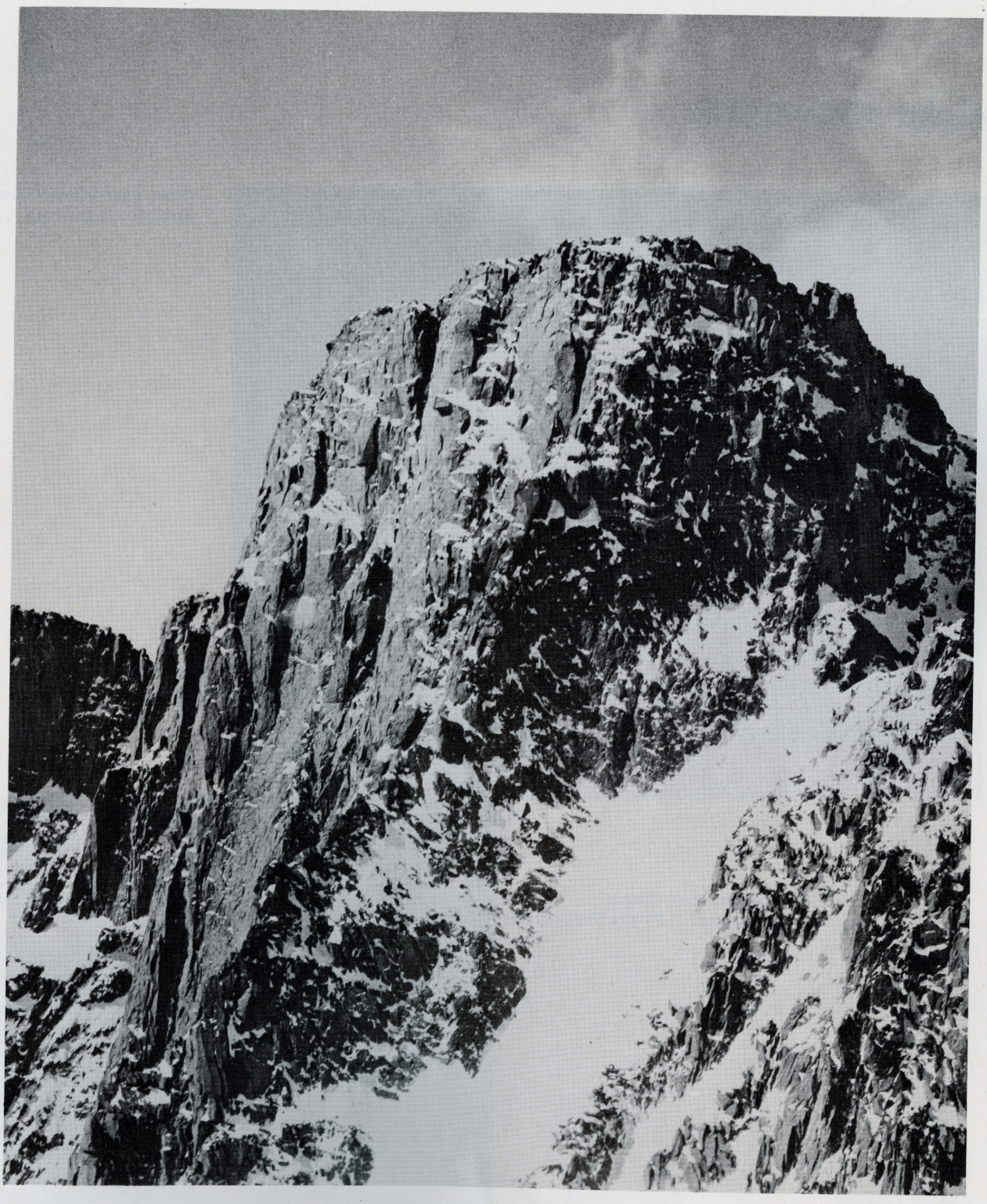
The sage hen, as do most grouse, nests on the ground. When they're nesting this bird warns of trespassers with a rapid, rasping, scolding cry.

## Sierra Iris

Not commonly associated with the Sierra, the Iris family boasts two residents in this mountainous area. They are the Sierra Iris *(iris hartwegii),* and the Western Blue Flag *(iris missouriensis).*

The Sierra Iris (shown above) grows in the yellow pine belt, between 2,500 to 6,000 feet above sea level, where the open forest land remains dry for most of the year. Sierra Iris flowers bloom in May and June, and display yellow petals with lavender veins and yellowish center.

The Western Blue Flag is similar in shape to the Sierra Iris, but differs in coloration, with whitish or pale blue flowers. The Western Blue Flag grows at higher altitudes than does its Sierra Iris kin. Moist meadows at elevations from 6,000 to 8,500 feet above sea level are the Western Blue Flag's habitat. This flower is found mainly on the east slope of the Sierra.



# Ridge of Contrasts

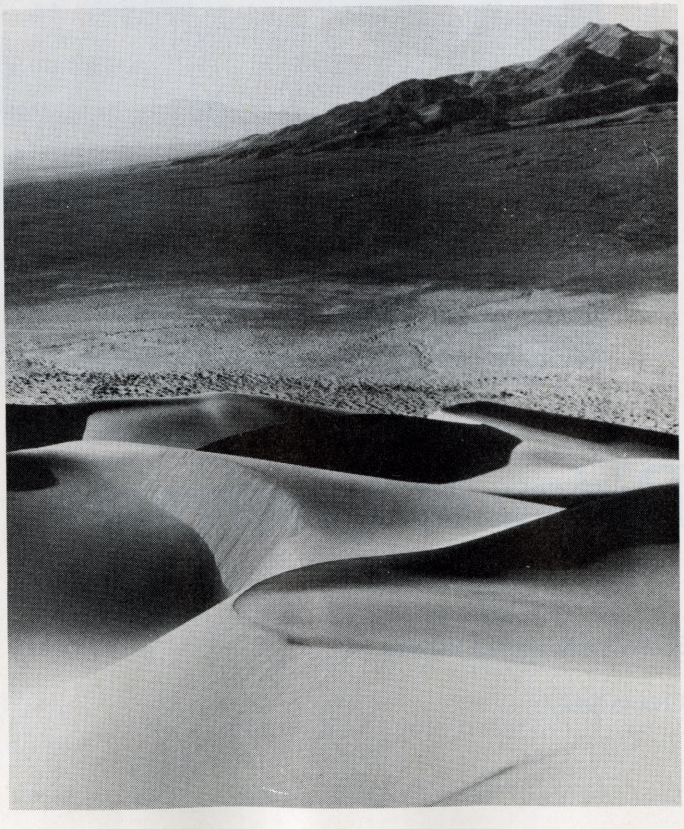
By Bill and Louise Kelsey

*A Photo Essay*

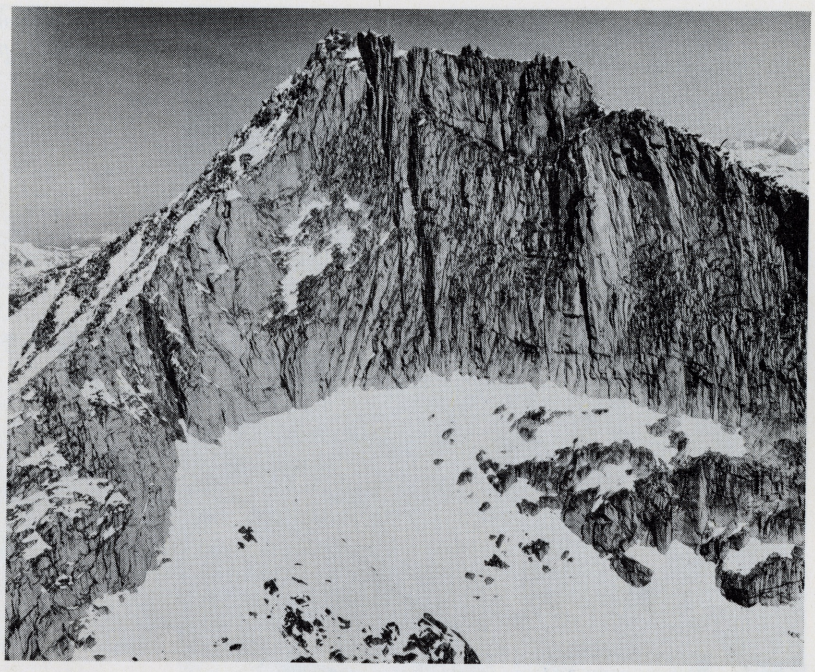
# Ridge of Contrasts

*Stark, gnarled, weathered beauty . . . squaw tea . . .*

*Shadow, sand, distant mountains . . . Eureka Valley dunes . . .*



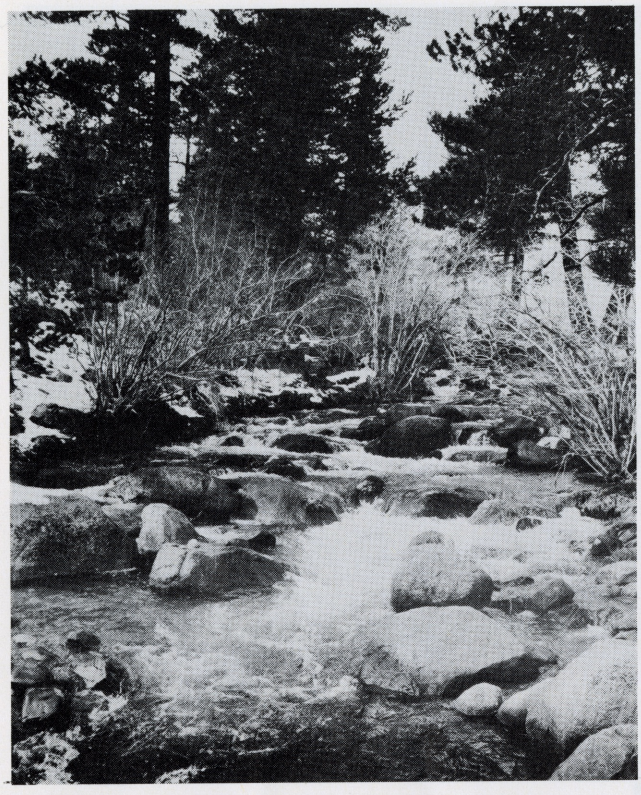
# Ridge of Contrasts



*Hostile, spine of the world . . . Mt. Clarence King . . .*

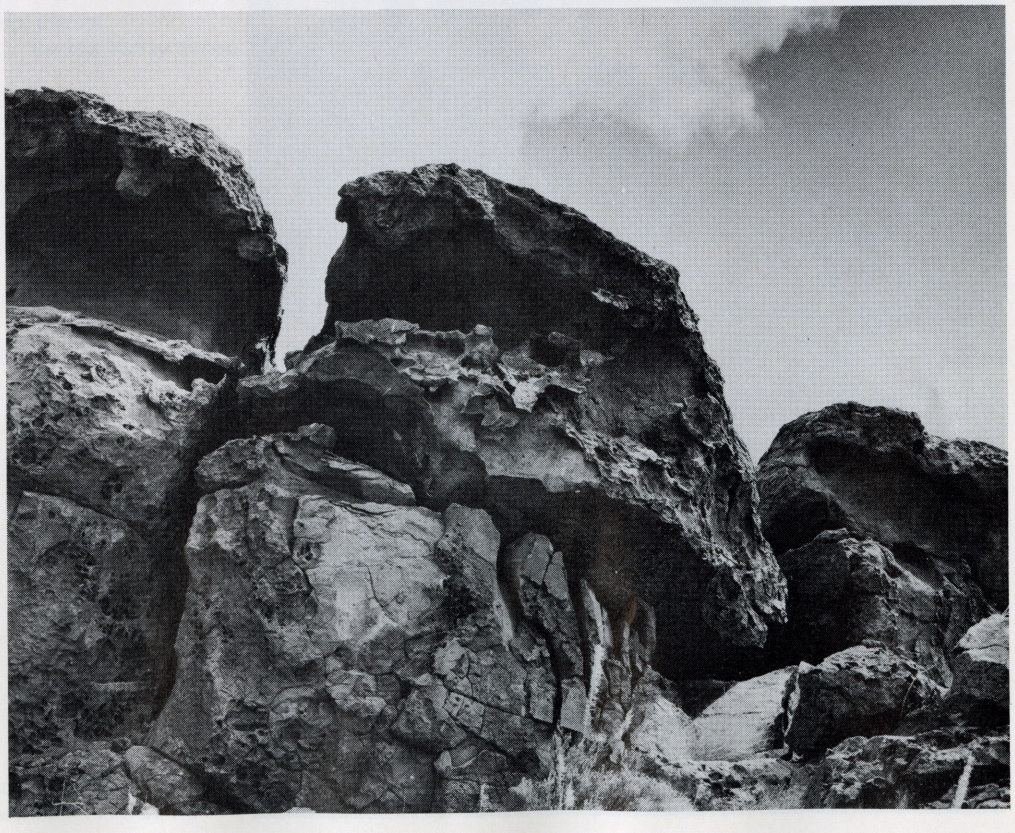
*Fragile, blooming briefly brilliant . . . Matilaha poppy . . .*

# Ridge of Contrasts



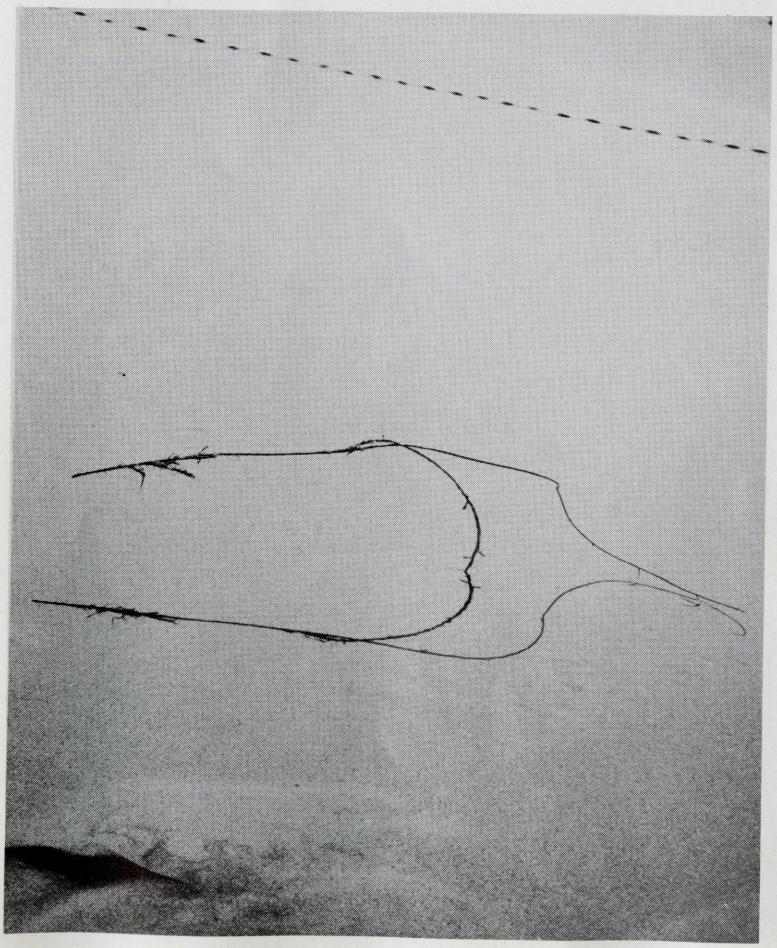
*Snow cold, sharp singing*
*downward . . . mountain stream . . .*

*Explosive heat, seared long*
*ago . . . volcanic tuffa . . .*



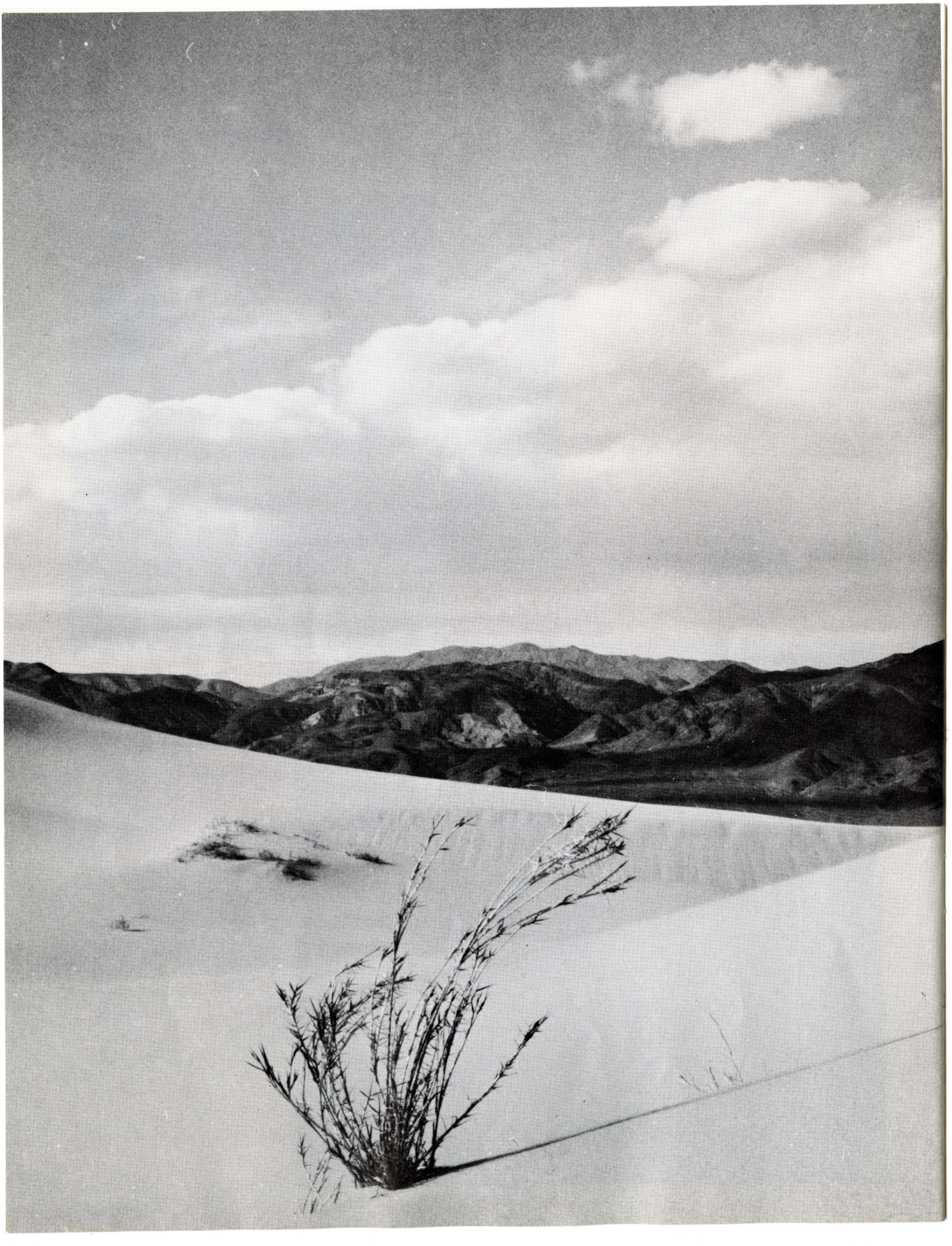
# Ridge of Contrasts

*Harsh ground, fierce winds, surviving . . . Juniper . . .*



*Once living, now shadow mirrored . . . a weed . . .*

(State Photo Winner: Clay Kelsey)



# I WILL NEVER DIE

By Louise Kelsey

Hurry, hurry, Tumbleweeds! I will not let you rest. Around you go – up, over, and away! I sigh as I see them disappear. Like a band of goats scurrying about a gentle hollow in the sand, they bounce over the crest of a dune and are gone. Let them play their little game. Try to hide from me, and I will find them. I know each nook and burrow, hole and cave. This desert valley is my kingdom, these dunes my castle. I will travel forever and never die.

Not a a cloud has drifted past the moon. Still, I cannot rest. The dune creatures will be surfacing, and I want to be with them. They hunt and are hunted. It is autumn. The kangaroo rats anxiously gather seeds for future dinners. The coyotes are putting on winter fat.

Footprints make strange designs in the sand. Daylight visitors guess about them, but if you will be still and watch with me this night, the prints will lose their mystery. Can you see the burrow opening there nearly hidden under the sagebrush? Watch carefully now. See the huge, beadlike eyes of my kangaroo rat. Magnificent tail! Much longer than his body with tuffs of hair at its tip. He uses it like a painter's brush to draw designs in the sand as he plays. If you could ruffle his fur as I do, he would feel as soft as a kitten, but you cannot. He has a quiet way of moving while he is harvesting. His feet, close to the ground, scoot him along like a mechanical toy. One move from you and he will bound away in great leaps. But, the noise I make does not bother him.

Can you see the dim shadow beyond that rock? Our harvester must be quick because another friend is looking for food. While we were watching the kangaroo rat, *el Coyote* was watching us from his scent post high on a ridge. Since we have been quiet, he will trot down his well worn path to this hunting ground. Where there are kangaroo rats, there are desert coyotes. Don't be overly critical of this hunter. He will catch rodents which carry tularimia and bubonic plague – transmittable to you, my friend.

The coyote becomes a well digger in dry times. Of course he gobbles up many of the animals who come to drink from his scooped-out water holes, but don't you expect some reward for your work? If you think the coyote is tricky, wait until morning and I will show you a true clown.

Get some sleep. I'll awaken you early.

What a shame to sleep the night away on the desert. Sleep should come in the hot, quiet daylight hours. The desert night is rich with excitement, terror and fun. Busy packrats make a game of moving things about. Sometimes they work with a purpose, but just as often they

# I WILL NEVER DIE

*. . . shadow moving across the sand . . .*

seem to be driven only by a moving mania. They have a secret, too. How do they walk, unhurt, over cactus joints, or carry large spiny stems of *cholla* to their nest? The moon is getting low. Deep shadows appear in the hollows of desert tracks. Move quickly, packrat! I see the fattish track of a diamondback, and there the unconnected, parallel markings of a sidewinder trailing in diagonal evil across the sand.

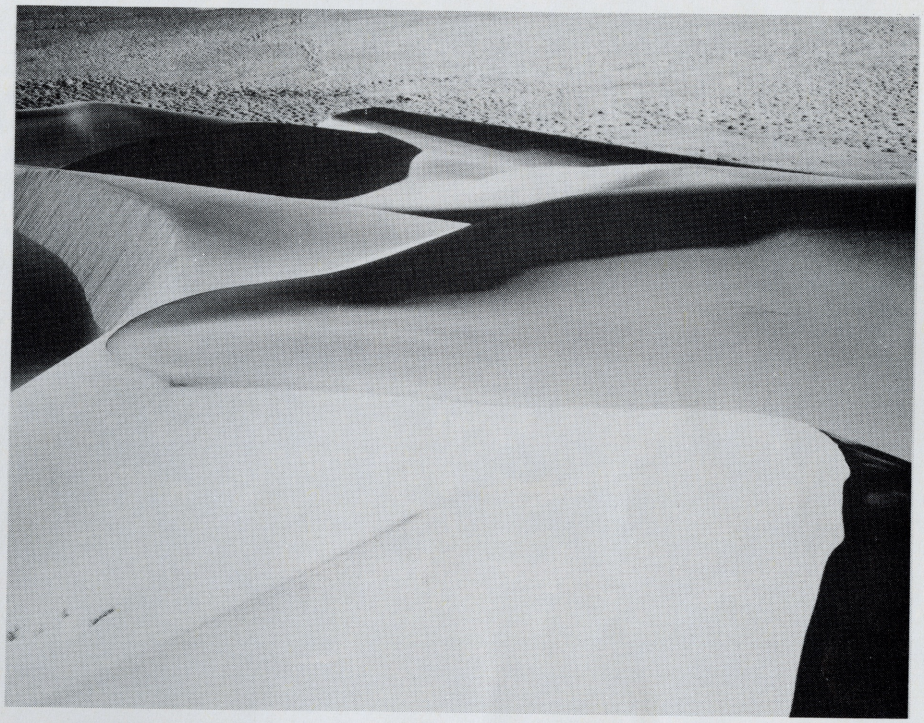
The night and its mystery fades. Time comes to call my visitor . . . but no. I will let roadrunner do it for me. Nothing would please him more than to tweak your nose, my sleeping friend. Ha, you're in for a surprise. Awake! Did my roadrunner startle you? Well, you startled HIM, but he'll be back. Here he comes now. The bird-clown brings a peace offering. He has found a lizard and would rather play with it than choke it down. This bird rarely flies, but he can run and leap like a ballet dancer. When he raises his bristle-tipped topknot or preens his too long tail, he looks as well costumed as a comic dancer. My little one's appetite is as odd as his appearance. Horned toads, grasshoppers, mice, spiders, bees, cactus fruits and berries just start his menu. So get up, my friend! Watch out for your nose!

Your visit is nearly over. Go before the sun bakes the life out of you. There are shadows moving across the sand. Look up. The vultures are gathering. They are not as ominous as you and your stories have made them. True, they are carrion eaters, but you can imagine what my kingdom would be like if these sad birds were not here. Soaring, gliding, you see them at their best. There is grace and beauty to effortlessness of flight. They are looking for food, and their food is the rotting flesh of the dead. One after another, the black, heavy birds settle around their macabre feast. The heat makes them ruffle their feathers, adding to their already unkept appearance. The rank, foul-smelling air contributes to the mood. No songs to lighten the somber scene.

Enough, visitor? Death frightens you? Then go! I'm not afraid. I will not die.

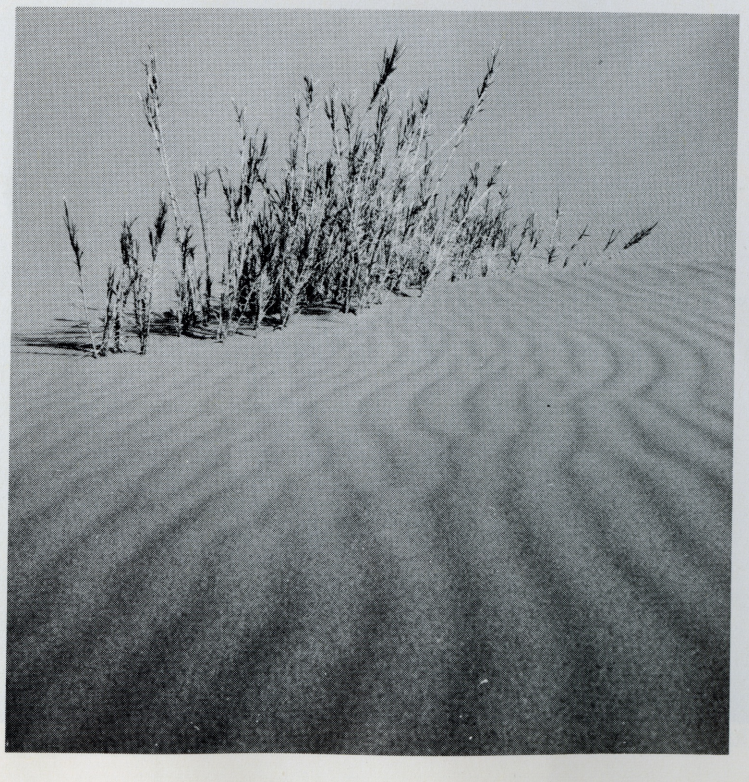
I am the wind. •

# I WILL NEVER DIE



*. . . these dunes my castle . . .*

*. . . this desert valley is my kingdom . . .*



# SEE HERE

## *Form, texture, light and technicalities: Photographing the Sierra*

By Bill and Louise Kelsey

The Sierra Nevada is a lot of rock. The vocabulary of adjectives used to describe its vast beauty – inspiring, awesome, challenging, enormous, and on and on – is insufficient. Yet anyone can return from his vacation with these millions of tons of granite in a little black box.

The equipment needed to make away with the Sierra is camera and film. Other requisites are patience, and the ability to *see* rather than just look. Which camera and what film are used depends on the kind of pictures the photographer desires, finances, and photographic ability and knowledge.

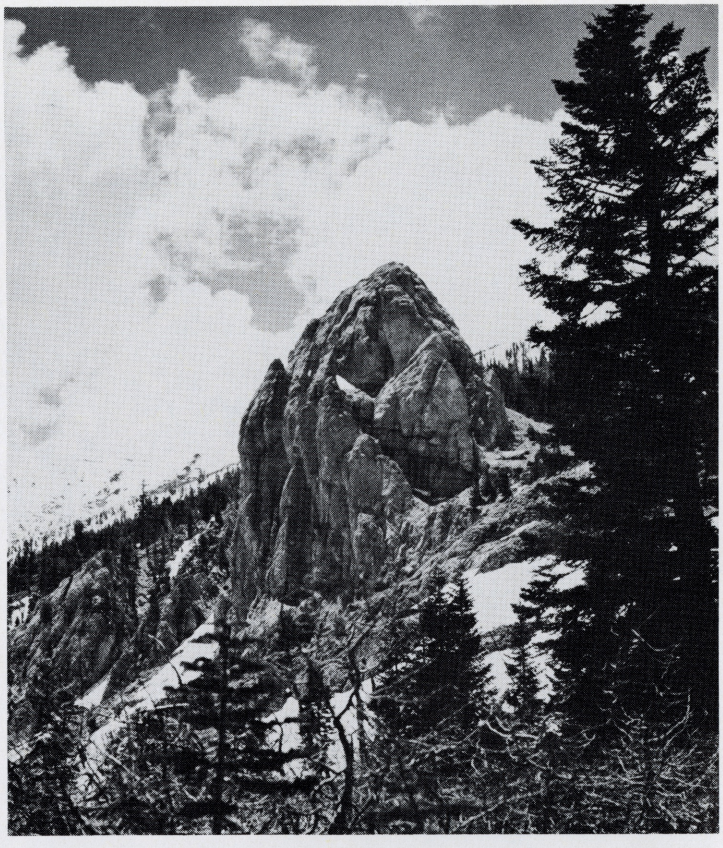
For now, the technical equipment selection will be left to the photographer and his reliable photographic supply store. What's important is to think about *seeing* a picture, then transferring what is seen to the film in the camera.

The Sierra is so filled with form, texture and light that it is tempting to simply point, shoot and hope. But, getting too much in a picture sometimes is worse than not including enough of a scene. The more a photographer tries to include in a single landscape, the farther from the scene he must be. The farther he is from a range of mountains, the smaller and less majestic they become in the eventual photographic print or color slide. So, move in!

Mount Morrison looks great – literally great – from the Hot Creek swimming hole, but a look through a camera's viewfinder may be disappointing. Try again from Highway 395. Better, isn't it? Now really move in on the mountain. A location just a few hundred feet up the Convict Canyon road will provide a more acceptable shot of this peak. Moving in is a technique that works quite well with almost any outstanding Sierra peak that has a canyon road leading to its base.

The Sierra is panoramic – so why not a panoramic view? Stand in one spot, as close to the mountain range as is possible, while still able to see all that is desired in the total picture. Then shoot four to six photographs from left to right, making a mental (or photographer's notebook) note on each shot, with details on the geology to the left of each picture. Move the camera so that a bit of the first picture overlaps into the left margin of the

*Bill and Louise Kelsey have lived in the Sierra most of their lives. Their photography captures the grandeur and the beauty of small things. The Kelseys' article on photography will be followed by others on landscapes, peaks, flowers, clouds, rock formations, people and animals. Each will include information on photographic technique, film and camera.*



*The lens moves in on the peak.*

second photo, and so on until the panoramic series is captured on film. When prints are made, they can be matched and trimmed, then mounted on a long, narrow piece of matte board and displayed with satisfaction. After this panorama technique has been attempted a time or two, the photographer will understand why the camera must be kept on a horizontal plane during the shooting of the series – for if it isn't, distracting ups and downs will result.

Most Sierra foothills are high desert country. Sage, tumbleweed, greasewood and mesquite present a new set of photographic challenges. Desert growth seems to go flat and uninteresting in mid-day. Experiment with early light – sunrise! Shadows are as important as the subject bush itself, so the lower the angle of illuminating sun, the longer and more dramatic are the shadows. Those who can't arise early enough for dawn light can try the late hours of the day. Sunset light offers a soft something all its own.

The photographer who works close to desert brush in early spring may be surprised to find tiny desert flowers, exquisite blooms that sometimes remain unnoticed because they're so close to the ground. Color film is a must for these desert jewels. The photographer should shoot as close to these flowers as his camera's lens will permit. Technicalities may intrude, and the photographer may wish to exchange the simple, pre-set camera for telephoto or extension bellows capability to magnify this floral beauty – but that's another article. Suffice it to say that the tiny perfection of desert flowers is photographically remarkable.

Moving upward into the Sierra itself simply standing on a prominent rise can be a lesson in geology. Varieties of texture and form is as infinite as the forces which errupted and erroded this mighty range of mountains.

The photographer's task is to discover a texture that pleases or excites him, then wait for the proper light to burnish it with shadow and depth. Full sunlight on an intriguing textured surface of stone will render a photograph flat and uninteresting. So, back to daybreak photography, or the gentle effects of day's end.

The photographer who insists on shooting later in the day in the Sierra might take home a lake. Water studies require time and patience – and a bit of luck. Mirror reflection – mountain to inverted mountain, tree to reflected tree – are stunning in their drama. Calm water is essential for a clear reflection, and Sierra air usually is most calm in forenoon hours. A slight breeze can lend a rippled, sparkling texture to the reflection, but a Sierra wind can ruffle a reflection to non-existence.

A point of interest is important in every picture. At the lake, seek out a gnarl of wood, a crag of rock. Nearly every lake has a driftwood jam at its outlet, or wind carved stone to frame its shoreline or mountain backdrop. When that point of interest becomes apparent, place that *single* exquisite piece of subject matter into a lower corner of the photo composition. This gives the viewer a starting point from which his eye may travel across the lake, into the skyline. In this way, the water scene, as desired, will dominate the composition, and the rock or driftwood will play its correct role as a focal point, yet remain of minor interest.

Remember, it is important to select just *one* attractive point of interest with which to accent an entire scene.

A camera is an excellent companion in the Sierra, whether the photographer comes to fish, hike, hunt, ski, camp or simply relax. If the fishing is poor, or hiking is tiring, or relaxing becomes a bore, the Sierra can be turned into an interesting, rewarding keepsake. See! Here!

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# Afterthoughts

The Sierra is unique. Diverse terrain, the range of activities and many climatic zones make the Sierra impossible to cover in a single issue of *Sierra.*

This initial issue is designed to inform readers of things they may expect in future editions of *Sierra.* The high standard of quality in staff contributions, the photography of Bill and Louise Kelsey, the illustrations of Manny Carbajal, the literary contributions of Evelyn Eaton, and the production skills of Dave Epperson are brought together in this issue.

This first edition is a sample of talent and quality only. Future issues will explore those diversities that make the Sierra unique, the outdoors, the activity, mountain and desert, the residents and visitors. Subject matter will be as varied as the nature of the Sierra itself. Only quality will remain the same.

Your comments on this first effort, as well as those magazines that follow, are necessary so that *Sierra* may provide you, the reader, with a valuable, informative magazine.

Please direct your comments to:

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